

I first want to welcome all of our guest first responders. Thank you so much for coming to Trinity today so that we can honor your service and your commitment to the communities in which you work. It's great to have you here.

I've been here now for a little over six months. And in that six months I've told you about God's love for all of us, and I've given you examples of that love. I have told you about God's forgiveness of us, and I have given you examples of that forgiveness and how it plays out in our lives. I have told you about God's healing grace that we are given, and especially during this Easter season, how that healing is manifested in the little (and not so little) resurrections that we experience. So, by this time you all know well that you are loved, forgiven, healed and restored by Christ, our living God. That knowing is called by some Christians – salvation. If you are so inclined you might say that you are saved. Some are troubled by this talk of salvation, but the people we have visiting with us today save people all the time. Rescue operations are daily occurrences in the emergency squads. Salvation in that way of thinking about it isn't troublesome. It's very welcome if you are in need of having your life saved. What if, maybe, the two kinds of saving aren't quite so far apart as you might imagine.

In Christian churches of the west, today marks the end of the Easter season, that season of resurrection and new beginnings. We have died with Christ at his death, and we have been resurrected into his new life. Here's the thing, God does not heal us, forgive us and restore us to wholeness (God does not save us you might say) so that we can then sit around and eat bon bons. What then does God want from us? Jesus tells us this morning in the passage from the Gospel of John as he prays for us. It seems confusing and repetitious prayer; hard to understand. He seems to say over and over; you in me and I in you and they in us ...It takes a bit of concentration to

really get the meaning out of this passage which is called the high priestly prayer at the conclusion of Jesus farewell discourse to his disciples. But It may not be unlike some of the prayers that you and I have prayed that don't maybe make the most sense to someone hearing them, but we know that they make sense to God.

What does God want from us? To get right to the heart of it, what Jesus is praying to the father is that we become one so that we will know perfectly that God loves us completely. Jesus is praying for unity between God, himself and us. Jesus doesn't want us to be unsure of God's love any longer. He wants that knowledge to be so ingrained in us that we just know it once and for all. That is salvation. Jesus prayed this for the disciples with whom he would only be for a little longer, but he also prayed this prayer for you and me thousands of years later. Jesus prays that the whole world will know that forgiveness and wholeness are right there for us through faith.

So how do we find that unity or that salvation? How do we come to know that God and Jesus and you and me are one? This is where the experiences of our guests today can teach us something. We have to put our faith into action. If we sit in our room and watch TV we probably aren't going to experience much in the way of God's love and healing grace. If we get up and get out and help someone, and get out of our own selves, we will almost always find God's love staring back at us in the form of a grateful person.

If you are an emergency fire or rescue worker you know exactly what I'm talking about. I know one young man who originally joined a volunteer fire department because he wanted to drive fast and blast the siren. I can't imagine that anyone would join the fire or ambulance squads for that sort of reason...is that even possible? But for this young man, he soon realized the truth of the matter.

Through looking into the eyes of people who were counting on him to get them to the hospital, rescue them from a car or building, through saving others he came to see that

he was being saved. He saw the God's promises coming true in their gratitude, and they saw the hope and help in him. He came to understand the great reward in life comes from not from seeking things for one's self, but in action that is what we might call self forgetting. We often find salvation in saving someone else.

The lessons that have been assigned for this, the last Sunday of Easter, are again from Acts, Revelation and the Gospel of John. If there is any one theme that pulls them all together it is God's power to save and to unite us in love, in prayer, and in action.

We read one more of the adventures of Paul and Silas In our last reading of Acts before Pentecost . They get themselves in trouble with the locals of Philippi, not because of the religion they are preaching (Romans at this time in history were fairly open minded to allowing all sorts of religions and gods). But Paul and Silas run afoul of the townspeople when they mess with the slave owner's means of making money. Unfortunately, Paul doesn't set the poor girl free but he does restore her to health through his faith in Jesus. It seems humorous too that he does so because the girl was annoying him.

The owners don't say right out that Paul has taken away their livelihood. But instead they are accused of advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans. But Paul is a Roman, so what has that got to do with it! The trial scenes in the book of Acts are all a little frustrating. Paul never gets a fair trial, and his arguments are never heard properly. People's greed and bad motives are things that will block any ability to truly love and be loved. Humans can try to frustrate God's plans

In the long run, that never works. God always has the last word. In this case God releases them from prison with the aid of an earthquake. Paul and Silas are quick to speak kindly to their jailer who asks what he must do to be saved. Saved from what? Did he want to be saved from the wrath of his employers, the Roman rulers who will be

angry that Paul and Silas got away? Or saved from God's anger for his role in imprisoning the saints? Or is the jailer asking about his own salvation? Maybe it's all of the above.

What can I do to be saved?, he asks. What can we do to be saved? The answer was the same now as it was then. Believe in God. Believe in God's promises and Love. And then, to really experience the truth of that love go out and save someone. Let that love of God equip you and empower you to act for someone else.

I am thankful today for the example of action we have in our visiting emergency personnel who give of their time and their expertise to save others, literally and perhaps spiritually sometimes too. Without you our communities would suffer greatly when we have fires, accidents and medical emergencies. Many of us have learned that there are caring people in the world through you – our first responders who are in the business of saving lives. Thank you.